

Issue: Compliance – Grievance Procedure (5-Day Rule); Ruling Date: March 8, 2019; Ruling No. 2019-4870; Agency: Department of Corrections; Outcome: Grievant Not in Compliance.



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Human Resource Management
Office of Equal Employment and Dispute Resolution

COMPLIANCE RULING

In the matter of the Department of Corrections
Ruling Number 2019-4870
March 8, 2019

The Department of Corrections (the “agency”) has requested a compliance ruling from the Office of Equal Employment and Dispute Resolution (“EEDR”) at the Department of Human Resource Management in relation to the grievant’s February 2, 2018 grievance. The agency alleges that the grievant has failed to comply with the time limits set forth in the grievance procedure for advancing or concluding her grievance.

FACTS

On or about February 2, 2018, the grievant initiated a grievance with the agency. The agency states that the third step response was mailed to the grievant on or about May 22. Having received no further response from the grievant, the agency sent, via U.S. Mail, a notice of noncompliance to her on January 25, 2019.¹ In its notice of noncompliance, the agency requested a response from the grievant within five workdays of her receipt of the notice. Since more than five workdays have elapsed since the agency notified the grievant of her alleged noncompliance and the grievant has not yet advanced or concluded her grievance, the agency seeks a compliance ruling allowing it to administratively close the grievance.

DISCUSSION

The grievance procedure requires both parties to address procedural noncompliance through a specific process.² That process assures that the parties first communicate with each other about the noncompliance, and resolve any compliance problems voluntarily, without EEDR’s involvement. Specifically, the party claiming noncompliance must notify the other party in writing and allow five workdays for the opposing party to correct any noncompliance.³ If the opposing party fails to correct the noncompliance within this five-day period, the party claiming noncompliance may seek a compliance ruling from EEDR, who may in turn order the party to correct the noncompliance or, in cases of substantial noncompliance, render a decision against the noncomplying party on any qualifiable issue. When an EEDR ruling finds that either party to a grievance is in noncompliance, the ruling will (i) order the noncomplying party to correct its noncompliance within a specified time period, and (ii) provide that if the noncompliance is not

¹ The mailing of correspondence, properly addressed and stamped, raises a presumption of receipt of the correspondence by the addressee. *E.g.*, *Washington v. Anderson*, 236 Va. 316, 322, 373 S.E.2d 712, 715 (1988).

² *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 6.3.

³ *See id.*

timely corrected, a decision in favor of the other party will be rendered on any qualifiable issue, unless the noncomplying party can show just cause for the delay in conforming to EEDR's order.⁴

In this case, the grievant appears to have failed to advance or conclude her grievance within five workdays of receiving the agency's third resolution step response, as required by the grievance procedure.⁵ Moreover, the agency notified the grievant of her noncompliance and she has not advanced or concluded her grievance.

As the grievant has apparently failed to advance or conclude her grievance in a timely manner, she has failed to comply with the grievance procedure. EEDR therefore orders the grievant to correct her noncompliance **within ten workdays of the date of this ruling** by notifying her human resources office in writing that she wishes either to conclude the grievance or request qualification of her grievance for a hearing from the agency head. If she does not, the agency may administratively close the grievance without any further action on its part. The grievance may be reopened only upon a timely showing by the grievant of just cause for the delay (for example, a serious illness, or other circumstances beyond the grievant's control).

EEDR's rulings on matters of compliance are final and nonappealable.⁶



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⁴ While in cases of substantial noncompliance with procedural rules the grievance statutes grant EEDR the authority to render a decision on a qualifiable issue against a noncompliant party, EEDR favors having grievances decided on the merits rather than procedural violations. Thus, EEDR will *typically* order noncompliance corrected before rendering a decision against a noncompliant party. However, where a party's noncompliance appears driven by bad faith or a gross disregard of the grievance procedure, EEDR will exercise its authority to rule against the party without first ordering the noncompliance to be corrected.

⁵ See *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 3.3.

⁶ See Va. Code §§ 2.2-1202.1(5), 2.2-3003(G).